

Controlled and occasional heroin use study

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While it is recognised that heroin is a dangerous drug causing considerable damage to individuals and communities, there are some people who appear to be able to control their use of the drug. A study, by the Institute for Criminal Policy Research, Kings College London, focused on a population of non-dependent and controlled dependent heroin users who saw their use as relatively problem-free. Using in-depth interviews with 51 people and an internet survey of 123 people, this study explored their experiences of heroin use and found:

- There is a largely hidden population of people who use heroin in stable and controlled ways over long periods of time.
- Some of the studys respondents used heroin in such a way that they had not become dependent on the drug. Others were dependent on heroin, but controlled their regular use to a stable level.
- Some controlled dependent users reported periods of chaotic drug use in the past.
- Most respondents managed to look after themselves and their families, held down jobs, remained in relatively good health, and had a full social life.
- Controlling heroin use is a complex process achieved in different ways. Respondents reported varying strategies for avoiding dependence and for regulating their use.
- Non-dependent users tended to follow using rules that enabled them to restrict the frequency with which they used.
- Dependent users contained the amount of heroin that they used on a regular basis, to ensure that their use did not intrude into their everyday work and social routines.
- Avoiding those involved in the heroin scene and hiding their use helped this group to maintain identities with no associations with uncontrolled use, junkies or addicts.
- The researchers conclude that popular understanding about heroin use is limited. There is little awareness that some people, in some circumstances, can effectively manage their heroin use so it causes them few problems. A better understanding of this point could lead to strategies to help chaotic users control their heroin use and to encourage users to take greater responsibility for regulating their own drug use.

To download a copy of the report go to:

Source: www.jrf.org.uk

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